

Show Me Heaven

Background

This is a future where although technology has brought about many miracles hyperspace, or any other way to travel great distances, has never been found. Wormholes can be created but they are tiny and need a controller at both ends. Fortunately technology does allow the replication of bodies so people use a type of teleportation to move across the vast distances of space. At one end body is scanned. The data is then transmitted through the wormhole and the body is reproduced at the other.

For the general population this is perfect and means that there is no need for space ships that travel any further than the solar system they start in. For exploration there is obviously the problem of not having a gate in the system you want to explore so to solve this thousands of one man ships are sent out. Each carries one end of wormhole with it. When it reaches its destination it performs all the normal data scans and at some point in the future a human is transferred through the wormhole to verify reading and do any further investigation. Once all investigations have been done the explorer is transferred back through the wormhole and straight out to another ship. As each wormhole only has two ends data has to go through a central switching system or passed out to go through a junction somewhere else in colonised space.

An explorer's life is one where six month stints are spent away from home with days or weeks in each new system. Communication with base is still possible although this is limited as it take quite a bit of power to allow the wormhole to be open enough to send data down it. In general text or short bursts of voice are used. Streamed video is very rare.

The Story

I really like the scenes in the film Alien where various characters find the crashed alien ship. Nothing is explained about it and for that reason it stirs my imagination. I wanted to capture something like that with this short story. The idea that something has been discovered and it could be anything – whatever you, as the reader, want it to be.

This is a kind of horror story and as with all horror stories I wanted some way of limiting the characters contact with the rest of the world. The use of e-mails back to a spouse seemed a good way of both giving a bit of depth to the character at the same time as getting across the story.

I wanted to build up the feeling of impending doom, the idea that something wasn't quite right so that by the end of the story the reader knows something is going to happen and it's just left to decide if the explorer is trying to lure the Human race to its destruction or has somewhere beautiful really been discovered.

Below are the initial notes for the various e-mails. You can see from this that I changed things around a bit as the various drafts progressed. The second to last e-mail wasn't even added to the story until the third draft as I was concerned the story struggled with pacing and needed something more near the end to help the reader along.

1. Saying bye as he prepares to move to the next location. This first location has proved to be negative.
2. Arriving at the system where the next signal has come from.
3. Setting the burn ready to go in to orbit around the planet where the signal is coming from.
4. Having scanned the lump of debris he is now preparing to approach. No sign of life.
5. Close approach shows some sort of structure on the small bit of rock.
6. He has been in the structure and it seems to be made from some sort of organic compound that re-shapes things for whoever is there. Gardens have appeared etc. that weren't there to start with.
7. Having checked around the compound he has found the central unit which he is going to enter. This is the only room without markings.
8. What I have found here is beautiful. I won't be coming back. There is no need to. If you can, tell everyone to come. We have found Heaven.

The initial notes show that I had decided the main character was going to be as a man, but this was never a set in stone. In the end I decided to deliberately make it more ambiguous, letting the reader decide. I did do some slight over emphasis on the emotional stuff, just to push the reader in the direction of a female a bit more. Hey, it could still be a man who's just more in touch with his feminine side.

I started without having any kind of emotes in the story at all, but as they are such a big part of our lives already I can't imagine that they wouldn't still be around in the future. Abbreviations I avoided, not because I don't think they'll exist, but because it makes it a lot more difficult for the reader.

Other Notes

Having completed the story, I don't think there was enough build up to the climax and the choice of telling the story via a series of e-mails was probably not the correct one. I might re-write it from a different point of view or in a different style at some point, but for now it stands as it is.